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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FINAL VISUAL PRESENTATION

by

SYLVIA BLASHKO

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTERS OF VISUAL ARTS

IN

Painting

DEPARTMENT OF ART AND DESIGN

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and
recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research,
for acceptance, a thesis entitled:

Final Visual Presentation

submitted by Sylvia Blashko

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Visual Arts.

Artist's Statement

Art and Nature have been inextricably related to one another to such a degree and for such a long time that it is almost impossible to think of one without the other.

The subject matter of my paintings deals with the infinitely diversified realm of plant forms which grow and perish with us, governed by a mysterious, rigid and eternal law of natural order. The constant repetition of this same process for thousands of years has been subject to alterations in climatic or soil conditions in which plants grow. However, with the amazing propensity of man in his pursuit of technological change in recent history, this cycle of birth, growth, death, and decay in nature has added another dreaded but certain feature - that of extinction.

Because I, like most everyone in the Western World, enjoy the benefits of technology, I can only observe and comment in a visual way on what has become a crisis of global proportions.

For the past several years I have attempted to come to terms with this notion of man's impositions on nature in relation to the two dimensional surface of the canvas. I am aware that Man imposes his structures on nature in ways that are often governed by social and economic forces. He frequently uses the grid to develop his urban centres and agricultural areas and, increasingly over time, he is coming to develop and use materials that not only deplete the environment in their production, but also have the quality of permanence on which nature cannot act in its eternal law which emanates from beyond this earth.

Initially, I took a macro viewpoint to convey my perceptions about Man as he orders his environment. The paintings that resulted, took on the appearance of maplike images

in which my feeling for the life and vibrancy of nature was represented by the free movement of painterly strokes and arbitrary and lively color while the man-made impositions were often symbolized by means of a grid or the implication of a grid. This latter aspect was handled by means of collage, restrained color and paint handling.

However, in recent months, I felt that I did not want to be so distant an observer or visual commentator. I recognized that I have an intense love for and fascination with specific natural forms and from this comes the desire to assimilate their every detail or to possess them through paint. In addition, I have always felt a strong affinity for nature in general and the idea that no matter how simple a natural form may seem at first glance, it is always multi-dimensional. It is not only itself but also a part of the complex whole. Despite what seems to be a casual and seemingly chaotic display of incredible variety there is an intrinsic order. This serves to trigger and free my imagination.

As a consequence my viewpoint has become "micro" in nature and the paintings involving plant forms have become more personal and complicated both in their activity and color. The manmade impositions are now expressed as simple repetitive geometric forms. Because I refuse to succumb to present-day feelings of despair, I want my paintings to be infused with a sense of optimism and hope about nature having the capacity to reclaim.

This notion is reinforced for me by the photography of Fay Godwin and the poetry of Ted Hughes in their book, Remains of Elmet, which is about an area of England once highly industrialized and now having returned almost entirely to agriculture.

Having always had an interest in pictorial space, over the past two years I have manipulated it in various ways.

In the most recent paintings I have tried to challenge traditional notions of both Western and Eastern approaches to pictorial space and have attempted to use both conceptions in a given painting. I begin with a natural object which serves as the basis for structural variants along abstract or near abstract lines. Hopefully, this reality is deepened and enriched by the abstraction. These two apparently contradictory powers, the perception of nature and the spirit of abstraction, have been a constant concern over the course of this Masters program.

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